



ONE's Tips: Reactive Media Relations

Quite simply, when you receive a call from the media, this is called 'reactive' media relations. This is because you are reacting to them, rather than feeding them a story pro actively.

When the media call you:

- clarify the information that they want, and make sure you fully understand the request
- answer immediately, as the quicker you respond, the higher your chances are of being quoted
- if you do not know something that is being asked, do not answer and just guess. Politely ask if you can get back to them
- keep a list of who rings you, (See activity form below)
- check deadlines, as if you miss them you have wasted your time and missed an opportunity
- if you cannot help then suggest alternative contacts

Important do's & don'ts:

- Don't be too casual; keep it simple and precise to enhance your chance of being quoted
- Don't make jokes, this will make you come across as uncaring
- Be careful what you say, if you don't want it read, then don't say it
- Don't miss deadlines
- Don't say yes to their summations, this is a favoured trick that journalists use to paraphrase opinions; it is better that words come from your own mouth
- Do use analogies, as these make complex subjects easy to understand
- Do proactively look for case studies – a case study can make or break a story – make sure any case study you use is properly briefed in advance
- Do as much research as you can before hand on the journalist, publication / media outlet and the potential questions
- Don't be afraid to ask the journalist to detail their request in an email. If it is a broadcast outlet, don't hesitate to ask for a list of questions in advance – this may sometimes be provided

The local media may request a response from Information Officers to a negative story or clarification of facts. The Information Officer will be expected to come back to the journalist with either a written statement or the opportunity to interview a spokesperson from within the organisation. Sometimes the journalist will specify which they prefer.

Importance of a Response Statement

- A response media statement is a document that is sent out to the media following a request for information. It is often used when the information requested is of a sensitive nature, or if a quote required is a person of importance within the organisation.
- Information Officers should liaise with Chris Connop at UGLE when formulating a response statement.
- There is no set rule of how to produce a response statement; each will vary depending on the issue being reacted to.
- It is up to the discretion of the Information Officer as to how much information is disclosed in the statement. A response statement is a balancing act for the Information Officer – to ensure enough information is provided for the journalist, without going into more detail than is required. However it is important to keep the statement quick and to the point. On average it is no more than a few lines (one paragraph) long.
- Try as much as possible to put a positive spin on the response as this is your opportunity to counter a negative/inaccurate story.

How to draft a Response Statement

The response statement should include:

- ❖ Your lodge's logo or a Freemasons logo at the top of the page
- ❖ Subject line stating what the response is about
- ❖ Explain what action is being taken/ what the true facts are/ your side of the story/ quote facts and figures to support your argument when possible
- ❖ Try to end the statement with a positive message about freemasonry (i.e. Freemasons always strive to support the local community, etc..)
- ❖ Always include contact information at the bottom of the statement.

Assigning spokespeople

It is essential to assign one or two spokespeople who are available for interview on request. A spokesperson could be someone from your provincial lodge, or someone who has a positive association with your provincial lodge.

Q & A's

Q & A's are a list of possible questions that could be asked during the interview, and model answers to be used by the interviewee as a response. It is the Information Officers role to produce the Q&A for the spokesperson prior to an interview. It is important to prepare mock questions relating to the issue, as these are the questions that are most likely to be asked.

Below is an example of some Q & A's

Q Is freemasonry a secret society?

A Perceptions that we are secret arose in the period after the Second World War after we had understandably gone low key fearing invasion in the light of the fact the Freemasons were sent to the concentration camps in Nazi Germany and persecuted elsewhere in the dictatorship of Europe. Now Freemasons are once again encouraged to speak out about their membership and be proud.

Q Is Freemasonry a religion?

A We are an inclusive organization, drawing members from all backgrounds, cultures and creeds. We have a common belief in a Supreme Being. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, Protestants and Catholics all sit together in harmony in Lodge, as do the rich and poor.

- Questions need to cover all aspects of the issue relating to your provincial lodge
- Model answers should use facts and figures to back up answers
- A detailed explanation of the issue is useful in order for the spokesperson to give a detailed response if needed
- Make the answers factual with a positive spin

Activity Form

An activity form is a call log of all the press calls that an Information Officer receives. This gives you an opportunity to keep track of the crisis/issue and monitor how it is developing. It also helps you organise who you have spoken to and provided information to and who you need to get back to.

Below is an example of an activity form and how you would set it out:

| Name of journalist | Name of Publication | Phone Number | Email Address | Deadline | Query | Action |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|----------|--|--|
| John Smith | Products Ltd | 01234 567891 | Jsmith@hotmail.com | 22.12.07 | Will the product in question get replaced? | Must phone them back, awaiting information |